

Antiquity, Debate Section

Authority vs power: capitalism, archaeology and the populist challenge

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We thank all of the commentators for raising crucial points that provide us with the opportunity to make important clarifications. Bernbeck and Pollock point out that in our work, only the people of the present matter, rather than those in the past. Although our discussion centres on living people, we also believe that the past is unfinished and that working with it allows us to build a different future. We also believe that archaeology has a responsibility towards the dead. We are, in a Derridean spirit, committed to “those others who are no longer or [...] not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born” (Derrida 2012: 18). There is, however, more than an ethical dimension to this; our plea for a new objectivity means that we are interested in the past *qua* past, not just in representations of the past in the present. This involves a form of knowledge that should not be confused with subjective or relativistic claims. Bernbeck and Pollock would surely agree with us upon Benjamin’s (1968: Thesis VI) words:

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger [...] The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes.

Bernbeck and Pollock are unconvinced by our argument concerning the coalition of predatory capitalism and reactionary populism. We agree that supporters of the latter are the victims of the former, but this does not mean that a dialectic that feeds back into itself is not actually in place. The American Rust Belt or the impoverished European working classes provide the voters, while neoliberalism, scapegoat politics (e.g. immigration, cuts in public expenditure) and economic policies leading to marginalisation, starvation and disease in turn produce more supporters of reactionary populism. In fact, political commentators today agree that while the current US President is entertaining the audience with populist rhetoric, corporations are performing better than ever.

Finally, Bernbeck and Pollock argue that our idea of shifting from collaboration to provocation requires contextualisation. We would like to clarify that we are *not*

advocating for the abandonment of collaborative practices. There are contexts where provocation should be discounted for political, ethical or practical reasons. Collaboration, however, cannot be considered a panacea: sometimes provocation is a better option—for example, to raise a critical consciousness.

Zimmerman posits that archaeologists in the USA have generally responded to the various populist pressures of the past century and have already started to enact what we suggest. This is true in many ways. It could, in fact, be argued that the practice of North American archaeologists is more radical than their discourse, which has all too often adopted the robes of multiculturalism. Still, the question of President Trump's constituency has not, we think, been properly addressed. The extended experience of critical archaeology in the USA suggests, however, that US archaeologists will be prepared for the challenge. Concerning our notion that archaeology must 'earn its keep', we do argue that archaeology has to be socially relevant, but that this relevance should not be measured in economic terms, or as applied knowledge or customer satisfaction. We agree completely that we must change archaeology's brand. The question is how to rebrand the discipline in a critical fashion, promoting its public appeal without trivialising it.

Hamilakis reminds us that we still need to decolonise the discipline. He eloquently provides methods of doing this through temporality and an emphasis on affect, with which we fully agree. We support the idea, long defended by our Latin American colleagues (Haber 2016), that a decolonised archaeology can bring alternative modes of being beyond capitalism and the state. Our point, however, is that decolonising archaeology is insufficient: a rearming to face a capitalism that no longer requires scientific legitimacy—because it dominates all other ideological, political and economic apparatuses—is badly needed. Hamilakis questions the geopolitics of our locality as southern Europeans. We do not, however, essentialise or mystify our geographic location as a pristine place of resistance; we understand our perspective as relational. Neither do we claim more legitimacy by emphasising our 'subaltern' position vis-a-vis the Anglophone academy. In doing so we would fall into the trap of epistemic populism ourselves!

Concerning the issue of identity, we concur that gender and race cannot be disentangled from class and the genealogy of capitalist modernity. We must move away from the depoliticised multicultural identity politics that have so far prevailed, and that have left the structural homogeneity of capitalism intact. It is necessary to reinsert race, sex and gender into the political economy of capitalism. We oppose the critical energy spent in fighting for the recognition of reified forms of difference, which end up fuelling the populist capacity to create scapegoats and to gain public support. Regarding the universalising character of our proposal, emancipatory politics have always been universal in their aspirations, as is the decolonised archaeology proposed by Hamilakis. The problem is not universalism *per se*—it is defining what kind of universal values are defended. The universalism we advocate is counter to the fragmentation and localisation of struggles promoted by multiculturalism.

Smith and Campbell accuse us of making a straw person argument against Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) before engaging in a straw fallacy themselves. Some of their criticisms are easy to dismiss. We never, for example, argued that there has been little examination of what "these marginalised communities think about archaeology and heritage" (above). There is, of course, much research on heritage and subaltern communities—but not those to which we refer: the supporters of, for example, President Trump, Brexit or European Far Right groups. More questionable is Smith and Campbell's claim that we overlook the extensive literature on communities that recognises their

political diversity. The problem here is that these communities, while comprising a variety of interest groups that often disagree, are rarely portrayed as being fractured by irresolvable antagonisms. It is horizontal differences (typical of identity politics), rather than vertical antagonisms, that are emphasised (Žižek 2001).

The two main points of contention concern the popular and teaching. Smith and Campbell argue that we share with conservative historians the same “long-standing discomfort in dealing with popular uses of the past” (above). If labels say more about those who need to label than about ourselves, then this is indeed very revealing of the assumptions and dichotomies with which CHS works: authorised *vs* non-authorised heritage, and experts *vs* the People. This allows no place for nuance: if you raise any criticism against the popular, you surely must be an authoritarian academic. The problem is that reality is more complex. We argue that the popular perspective cannot be taken as immediately correct (even superior) or impervious to criticism. Against the simple scenario where the virtuous People fight the evil expert, we observe a complex field of social relations and forms of knowledge-power, embedded in a global capitalist political economy. Furthermore, we certainly do not promulgate a ‘political programme’: this is not a manifesto.

The same simplification occurs in their criticism about teaching. Here, Bernbeck and Pollock also raise a note of caution, arguing that we come close to reversing the gains of post-colonial archaeology. Smith and Campbell go a step further by accusing us of trying to reassert epistemic authoritarianism. We believe that our text has sufficient elements to dispel both the suspicion and the accusation. We fully embrace the post-colonial critique and admit that there are groups (e.g. indigenous peoples) from which archaeologists have much to learn. We reclaim a critical, non-authoritarian reconstruction of archaeological knowledge that is ready to face current social debates without having to plead for acceptance by the People. It is vital here to return to the anarchist distinction between authority, based on talent and knowledge, and power, based on the locus of enunciation and imposed through symbolic violence. We accept, of course, that teaching is a two-way street. We defend an archaeology that “learns in the process of educating” (above). Our feeling is that Smith and Campbell’s comment evinces a desire to retain authority within CHS, rather than engaging in a constructive debate that reckons with a new political scenario.

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